



EXHIBIT 9
DATE 3/17/2011
HB 610

March 17, 2011

To: Representative Walter McNutt, Chairman, and Members House Appropriations Committee

RE: Kill or amend HB 610

For forty years I have owned forest land, paid taxes and practiced good stewardship on my certified Montana Tree Farm. I strongly object to the 50-60% + increase in fire protection fees (taxes) and associated increase in the caps on percent of the Montana fire suppression budget charged to private landowners. These proposals are not fair and they will just help push more forest landowners to convert to other uses because forestry costs are too high and returns too low.

First we are hit with the unreasonable property tax re-appraisals that cause our taxes to be increased over the next six years due to appraisals based on record high real estate bubble values along with near record low prices for our timber.

Second, private landowners are not the cause of skyrocketing state fire suppression costs. The federal government nor their "firefighting partner", MT DNRC, will not disclose the facts about how catastrophic fires (1000 acres +) exported from federal lands are the number one cause of the increased State fire suppression costs and destruction of property.

One example, the 2003 Crazy Horse Fire started in the federal Mission Mountain Wilderness, exploded in heavy continuous fuels out of the wilderness across the Flathead Forest onto private land. When the fire got to private land where the forest has been managed and fuels reduced, the fire was controlled before it could burn the community of Condon, MT. The Forest Service had done nothing to manage fuels along their boundary to increase probability of controlling a fire before it got to the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). The State was charged 90% of the suppression costs to the tune of \$11,522,023. (DNRC spreadsheet showing, Fire Name, Origin, % charged to State, total State cost) Why? This expensive federal fire charged to state is not fair.

Contrary to political dogma, global warming is not the cause of the vast outbreaks of mountain pine beetle, Douglas-fir bark beetle, fir engraver beetles, and spruce budworm that is turning millions of acres of federal forests red to grey to black. The real cause is the fact that millions of acres of federal forests burned in the period between 1880 and 1910 are aged 100 years or more to provide optimal feeding and breeding habitat for insects adapted to those conditions. Any normal drought will trigger massive insect reproduction in those conditions and the population will not subside until enough host trees are killed to modify their habitat. Forest scientists have been warning of these outbreaks for decades, but federal land managers did little to modify the optimum bug habitat before our current catastrophic outbreaks.

In addition to the lack of timber management and resulting increase in fire fuels on federal forests over the last two decades, we have seen access to federal land incrementally reduced to the point that the probability of getting to a fire origin and suppressing it before it becomes unmanageable is vastly reduced.

The 2007 Skyland fire on the Flathead is a perfect example where a logging road that would have gotten crews and fire pumps near the fire origin, was barricaded with earth berms and steel guardrail bolted to concrete posts so that no crews could get near the fire until heavy equipment was dispatched to open the road. That fire burned out of the Flathead, across the continental divide, across the Lewis and Clark NF onto the Blackfeet Tribe lands where private property was destroyed and over \$25 million in suppression costs incurred. The state of Montana should not have to subsidize federal land management policies and decisions including letting wilderness fires burn clear out of the forest onto private lands such as 2007 Fool Creek and Ahorn fires that cost over \$25 million each.

Please require a Legislative audit of State firefighting costs for fires over 1000 acres, origin on federal lands, for seasons 2000-2009 to sum the costs and percent of total suppression costs charged to State of Montana for these federal fires. Total state costs due to Federal origin fires should be shown as a percent of total state fire suppression costs for the decade to educate citizens and legislators on the major cause of state fire suppression increases.

Federal fires that escape onto private land should be 100% federal responsibility. Private forest landowners should not be responsible for funding over 33% of total base State fire and aviation budget due to the Federal responsibility for state fire suppression costs, and the fact that the state fire budget finances eastside fire districts where non-forest landowners benefit but pay nothing.

Montana private tree farmers already suffer the costs inflicted by federal land neglect. We must annually cope with federal forest's exports of weeds, large predators, waves of destructive forest insects, damage from catastrophic fires, subsequent floods, and loss of timber markets. Private forest landowners should not have to subsidize the costs of federal land management policies nor should we subsidize non-forested local fire districts across the entire state.

Please strike the proposed increases in taxes on private forest landowners in HB 610. Require a study of 10 years record, to determine origin, percent of state cost, and total amount of state fire suppression costs to determine a fair long term basis for forest landowners. We just can't afford the increases proposed in HB 610.

Respectfully,



Fred D. Hodgeboom,
406.837-1363

Multi-Jurisdictional Fires

Year	Fire Name	Protection at Point of Ignition	State Share %	State Cost
2003	Cooney Ridge	Federal USFS	65%	\$12,512,500
	Black Mountain	State	2%	\$253,114
	Winslow	Federal USFS	57%	\$3,723,328
	Strawberry Lake	Federal USFS	17%	\$245
	Mineral Prim/Boles Mdw	Federal USFS	82%	\$18,783,740
	Ash Draw	State & County	50%	\$19,909
	Missouri Breaks	State & County	25%	\$698,060
	Crazy Horse	Federal USFS	90%	\$11,522,023
2004	Graveyard Cr.	State & County	50%	\$95,277
	Coon	State & County	60%	\$5,927
	Little Bradshaw	State & County	55%	\$164,429
	Foundation	State & County	50%	\$45,735
	North Miller	State & County	56%	\$58,101
2005	Knox	State & County	25%	\$131,250
2006	Black Pulaski	Federal USFWS	28%	\$840,000
	King	State & County	70%	\$70,000
	Watt Draw	Federal USFS	10%	\$150,000
	Bundy Railroad	State & County	85%	\$2,337,500
	Big Creek	State & County	100%	\$559,503
	Dovetail	Federal BLM	50%	\$148,721
	Holland Peak	Federal USFS	6%	\$3,460
	Jungle	Federal USFS	18%	\$3,187
	Derby - Prior to FEMA	Federal USFS	70%	\$13,403,188
2007*	Meriwether	Federal USFS		
	Skyland	Federal USFS		
	Brush Creek	State		
	Chippy	State		
	Jocko Lakes	CS&KT		
	Sawmill	Federal USFS		
	Black Cat	State		
	Powder River Complex	State & County		
	Tin Cup	Federal USFS		

* 2007 Cost Share agreements are not yet finalized.